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**NOAA LEADING THE WAY IN TSUNAMI RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**  
***Local Tsunami Exercise Kicks off Tsunami Awareness Month in Hawaii***

Advanced computer models, inundation maps, deepwater buoys, an expanded seismic network, evacuation signs, educational videos and teaching aids are all products of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service's (NWS) National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP) designed to help communities become better prepared for a tsunami. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Even though tsunamis are rare, it is imperative we ensure that the large population now living near the coast understands what the dangers are and knows how to protect themselves from a destructive tsunami," said Jeff LaDouce, manager of the U.S. tsunami program and director of the National Weather Service (NWS) Pacific Region. "These tools help scientists better understand and predict tsunami behavior, which will reduce false alarms and enable officials to make better informed decisions that will ultimately save lives and property."

As part of Tsunami Awareness Month, a statewide local tsunami exercise is being held today in Hawaii during the monthly siren test, beginning at 11:15 a.m. All activities will be invisible to the public. Participating in the exercise along with NOAA's Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, International Tsunami Information Center and National Weather Service Honolulu Forecast Office, are Hawaii state and county civil defense agencies, state and county warning points, Hawaii State Department of Education, American Red Cross, Hawaii Tourism Authority, Pacific Tsunami Museum and Civil Air Patrol.

"The exercise will focus on Hawaii's ability to respond to a locally generated tsunami," said Ed Teixeira, vice director of civil defense. "It provides an opportunity for participants to review their local tsunami response procedures and to promote preparedness."

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Following the exercise, a review and evaluation will be conducted by all participants. "The exercise will help us improve our tsunami warning procedures and products and be more prepared for the next real event," said Chip McCreery, director of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. "The last local tsunami in which lives were lost occurred in 1975 near Halape on the Big Island. Two generations have grown up in Hawaii since then with little experience or knowledge of tsunamis. It is an educational challenge."

According to NOAA's National Geophysical Data Center, tsunamis have claimed more than 3,000 lives in just the last 10 years. More than 200 tsunamis are known to have affected the United States since the first records were kept in the 1700s.

NOAA's two tsunami warning centers were established in 1948 in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and 1967 in Palmer, Alaska, following devastating tsunamis in those states. The National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program was created in 1996 after a magnitude 7.1 earthquake near Cape Mendocino in northern California raised concerns about a tsunami threat to the west coast. The five Pacific states teamed up with NOAA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. Geological Survey to work towards goals to provide early warning of tsunamis and educate citizens about evacuation. The program has made significant progress in mitigation, hazard assessment and warning guidance.

Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California and Hawaii are in the process of completing inundation mapping for communities at risk. According to Eddie Bernard, director of NOAA's Pacific Marine Environmental Lab, about 3 million people are at risk in 512 U.S. cities and towns. "So far, maps have been generated for 125 communities that are home to about 1.3 million of those residents," he said. The maps show how far inland tsunami flooding will reach; some include information about how fast the flow of water might be and how long the inundation will last.

Six deepwater tsunami detection buoys are deployed in earthquake-prone areas off the Aleutians, the northwest coast of the U.S., and Chile. The buoys send back wave information in real time to the warning centers. This tsunami warning capability is already paying big dividends, noted retired Air Force Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, director of the National Weather Service. "Data received in November 2003 following a magnitude 7.5 earthquake off the Aleutians convinced officials in Hawaii to cancel a tsunami warning that saved the state an estimated \$68 million," he said. The tsunami detection network will consist of 20 sensors when it is completed in 2011.

Two other significant advances brought by the NTHMP are improvements in communications and an expanded seismic network. Not only are the warning centers receiving more data than before, but they are receiving it more rapidly. Innovative software packages enable faster processing and dissemination of warning products.

Educational tools produced by the NTHMP include classroom curriculum, safety videos, publications, evacuation signs, displays and training workshops. The program also encourages evacuation drills in public schools.

Education about local tsunamis is a particular concern. There is virtually no warning for a local tsunami, which is caused by a nearby earthquake or underwater landslide. Often the ground shaking is the first indication of a potential tsunami. In this instance, prior public education to get to high ground quickly may be critical to survival.

Tsunami Awareness Month commemorates the destructive April 1, 1946, tsunami in which 159 people in Hawaii lost their lives. Activities and public events are held to promote tsunami preparedness.

NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS) is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings for the United States and its territories. NWS operates the most advanced weather and flood warning and forecast system in the world, helping to protect lives and property and enhance the national economy.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Weather Service: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov>

Tsunamis: <http://www.tsunami.gov/>

Tsunami Awareness Week:

[http://www.prh.noaa.gov/itic/tsunami\\_events/media/media.html](http://www.prh.noaa.gov/itic/tsunami_events/media/media.html)